

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 8, 2005

The Honorable Mike Leavitt
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

As we begin the long recovery from Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans, we are writing to urge you to ensure that the federal government devotes the necessary resources to the psychological casualties of this unprecedented disaster.

As many Members of Congress, numerous experts, and many within the Administration have recognized in the context of the war in Iraq, extreme stress and trauma can have a profound impact on individuals, in both the short- and long-term. If combat and the chaos of war can disable even those who are trained for battle, imagine the fallout of the last week's events -- especially on higher-risk populations such as those who have suffered previous traumas or have pre-existing mental illnesses. Science has shown us that while most people have the resiliency to recover and move on after significant trauma, others have biological reactions in their brains that force them to continue experiencing the heightened emotions long after the trauma has passed. This reaction is not a sign of weakness, but a disease of the brain that is treatable, especially when treated early.

Research has also shown that the sustained effectiveness of first responders, clean-up crews, and even mental health providers themselves will depend on carefully structuring the environment and making available interventions under the direction of appropriate experts. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention gained valuable experience in developing appropriate mental health supports for relief and recovery workers involved in the Indian Ocean tsunami in January. After the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, divorce rates, alcoholism and drug abuse rates, and domestic violence all spiked among first responders. We owe it to the heroes on the Gulf Coast to keep them safe not only from undue physical risk, but from preventable brain disorders.

Brain disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder are frequently overlooked as emergency responders contend with more highly visible challenges. Yet the brain disorders have the capacity to cause life-long disability and death by suicide or reckless behavior years after the official disaster relief efforts have ended. In fact, research shows that these disorders frequently appear months after the initial trauma.

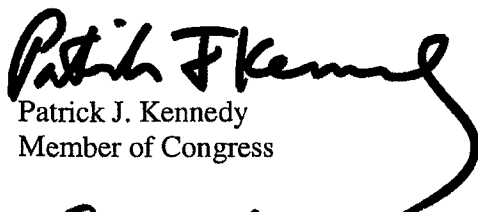
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As you coordinate the federal response, we strongly urge you to make the treatment and prevention of brain disorders like PTSD a critical component of the relief efforts. At a minimum, we ask you to consider the following:


- How can the federal government help states and communities meet a surge in demand for mental health care by survivors of the hurricane and flooding, not just in the first months, but also over the longer term?
- Can the federal government, perhaps through the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, coordinate displaced licensed mental health providers from the Gulf Coast to meet the demand for services for responders and victims?
- How can expertise from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the CDC, the Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, and elsewhere be brought to the months-long recovery and clean-up efforts to ensure the continued effectiveness and mental health of those involved?
- What steps will be taken to keep families and social networks intact as residents are relocated?
- What resources will be directed to the National Institute of Mental Health to ensure that from this tragedy we take the opportunity to learn more about how to prevent and treat brain disorders in the future?

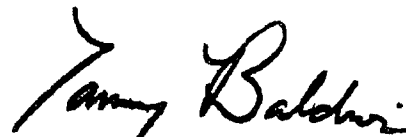
Thank you for your attention to these critical issues. We appreciate the complexity of managing the recovery of this horrific disaster and, like all of our colleagues, stand ready to help you and your Department meet the country's needs.

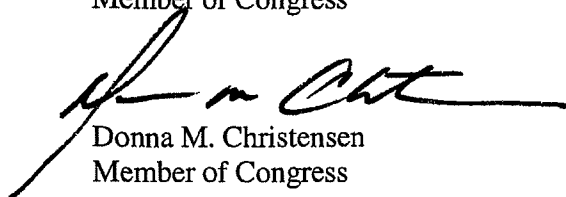
Sincerely,



Patrick J. Kennedy
Member of Congress



Sue Myrick
Member of Congress

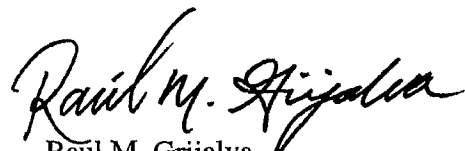

Rush D. Holt
Member of Congress


Tammy Baldwin
Member of Congress

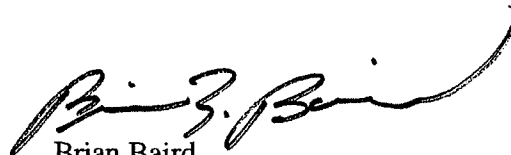

Donna M. Christensen
Member of Congress

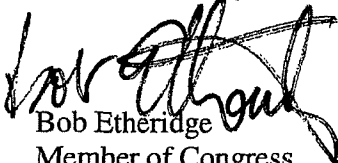

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress

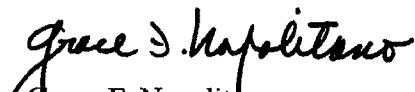

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress


Brad Miller
Member of Congress

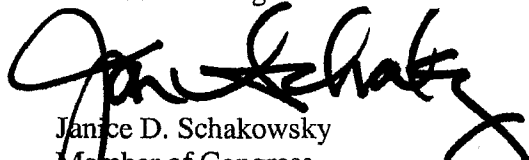

Brian Baird
Member of Congress

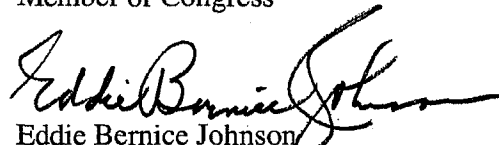

Bob Etheridge
Member of Congress

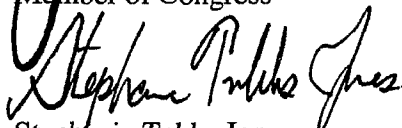

Jim McDermott
Member of Congress



Grace F. Napolitano
Member of Congress

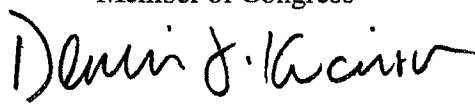

Neil Abercrombie
Member of Congress

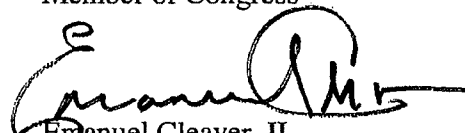

Janice D. Schakowsky
Member of Congress

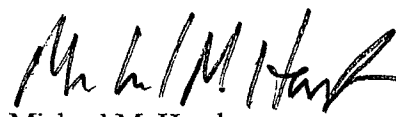

Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress



Stephanie Tubbs Jones
Member of Congress



C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress


Dennis J. Kucinich
Member of Congress


Emanuel Cleaver, II.
Member of Congress


Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Lois Capps
Member of Congress

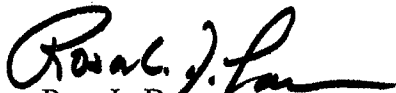

Carolyn C. Kilpatrick
Member of Congress

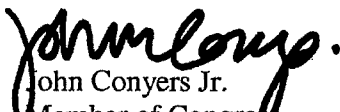

Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

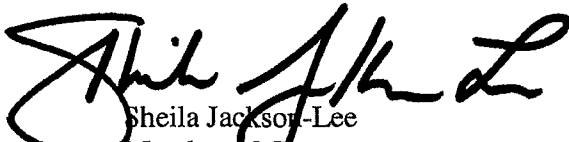

Ted Strickland
Member of Congress



Mike Ross
Member of Congress



Jim Davis
Member of Congress



Rosa L. DeLauro
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John Conyers Jr.
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Sheila Jackson-Lee
Member of Congress


Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

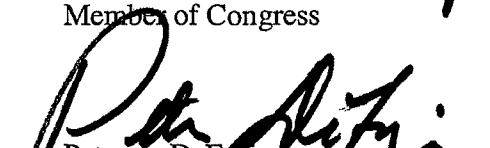

John Lewis
Member of Congress

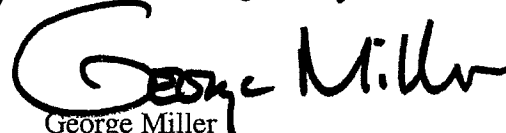

Carolyn McCarthy
Member of Congress

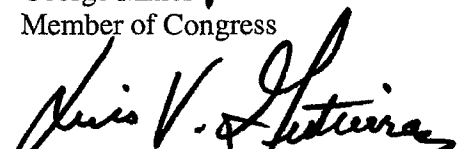

Fortney Pete Stark
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress

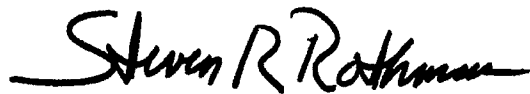

Carolyn B. Maloney
Member of Congress


Peter A. DeFazio
Member of Congress

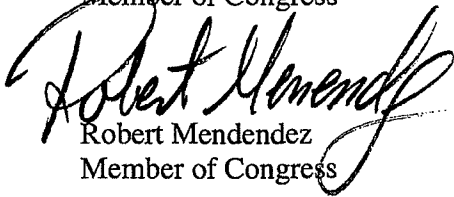

George Miller
Member of Congress


Luis V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress


Cliff Weldon
Member of Congress



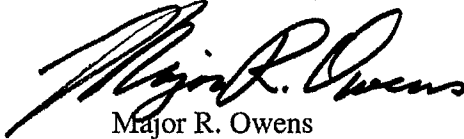
Steve R. Rothman
Member of Congress



Robert Mendendez
Member of Congress



Lane Evans
Member of Congress



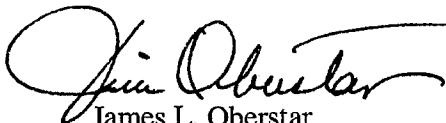
Major R. Owens
Member of Congress



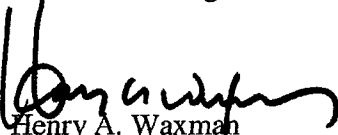
Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



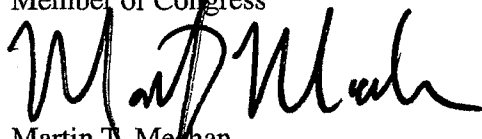
Lynn C. Woolsey
Member of Congress



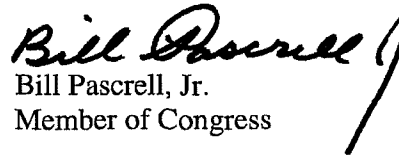
James L. Oberstar
Member of Congress



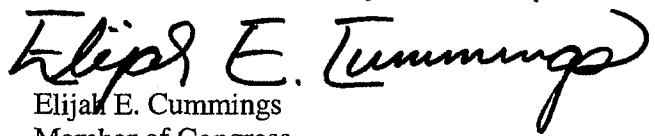
Henry A. Waxman
Member of Congress



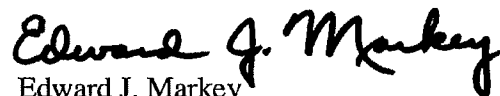
Martin T. Mehan
Member of Congress



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress



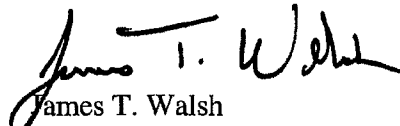
Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress



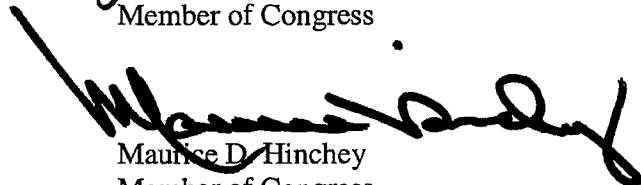
Edward J. Markey
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Jane Harman
Member of Congress



James T. Walsh
Member of Congress



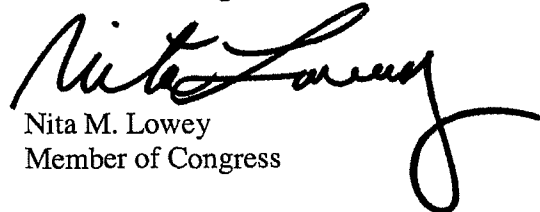
Maurice D. Hinchey
Member of Congress



William J. Jefferson
Member of Congress



Tom Lantos
Member of Congress



Nita M. Lowey
Member of Congress